A Brief Overview of the County Boards of Education and the County Superintendent

History

The offices of County Boards of Education and County Superintendents were established in the mid-1800s and have seen many changes in their structure and function.

The position of *County Superintendent* was established in 1849 by the California Constitution, but was an ex officio duty of the County Assessor. Over the next 30 years, the office of County Superintendent was created by statute, then made elective, and then made a constitutional office. In 1976, voters in each county were given the authority to determine whether the superintendent would be elected by the voters in the county or appointed by the County Board of Education. [1] (Note that in Trinity County the position is elected.)

County Boards had their origin of sorts in 1860 when the legislature created county "Boards of Examination." These boards were headed by the County Superintendent and were responsible for examining teachers and issuing certificates. Then, in 1881, the legislature created County Boards of Education comprised of the County Superintendent and four board members (including two experienced teachers). An amendment to the Constitution in 1884 required that the Legislature provide Boards of Education with the same powers prescribed for the Boards of Examination in the 1860 statute. It was not until 1956 that the first *elected* County Boards of Education took office.

In 1976, a constitutional amendment gave County Boards the power to set the salary of the county superintendent.

Structure & Relationships

County superintendents are selected in California by one of three ways. In 53 of the 58 counties, the county superintendent is an elective office. In four counties (San Diego, Santa Clara, San Francisco and Sacramento), the superintendent is appointed by the County Board of Education, and in Los Angeles County, both the superintendent and the Board of Education are appointed by the County Board of Supervisors.

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[1] California County Boards of Education. "County Board Guide to Effective Governance Handbook." February 2015. www.theccbe.org/Resources/CountyBoardGovernance/.

Legal Authority

Some general duties of the County Board of Education are established in Education Code sections 1040-42. These include, but are not limited to, approving the County Office of Education's budget; reviewing interim financial reports and the annual audit; fixing the salary of the County Superintendent; serving as an appeals body for student expulsions from districts, hearing appeals regarding inter-district transfers; adopting courses of study for some programs and evaluating program effectiveness; approving and overseeing charter schools; and adopting rules and regulations for the board's own governance.

The county board has a limited role in personnel issues in the County Office of Education (COE). In the four counties where the superintendent is appointed by the board of education, the board hires and evaluates the superintendent; in 53 counties, because the County Superintendent is elected, the board does not. Furthermore, it is the County Superintendent who is responsible for all the other employees in the COE.

The Role of the County Superintendent

The position of county superintendent of schools has evolved to meet the changing needs of the state and its students. The responsibilities of these constitutional officers fall generally into these categories:

- Educating specific student populations (i.e., special education and disenfranchised youth)
- Monitoring and oversight of student academic environments
- Monitoring and oversight for district fiscal stability
- Providing academic support and assistance to districts and their schools
- Providing direct services to small school districts
- Implementing regional support activities to assist district and school staff[2]
- Approving district plans
- Providing Differentiated Assistance and/or Comprehensive Support and Improvement to districts and/or schools

[2] http://ccsesa.org/members/county-superintendents/